

Primal Leadership, by Daniel Goleman

The fundamental task of leaders is to prime good feelings in those they lead. In *Primal Leadership*, Daniel Goleman shows why understanding the powerful role of emotions in the workplace sets the best leaders apart from the rest, not just in tangibles (better business results and retention of talent), but also in the important intangibles such as higher moral, motivation and commitment.

In the XXI century, globalization, uncertainty and technological complexity have placed the leader as one of the most fundamental assets within organizations. They have become responsible for creating systems that are capable of generating cohesion and alignment even in very large organizations and great functional and geographical distances.

Through my experience as a consultant in Axialent, I constantly verify the profound influence leaders have on the mind-frame and behavior of the organization's members. Thus, becoming a great leader is not only a great challenge for many managers but also a necessity.

Through deep psychological and scientific analysis, Daniel Goleman's book introduces us to the leader's fundamental task, and most difficult challenge: understanding the powerful role of emotions in the workplace and most fundamentally, developing the capacity to drive emotions positively, which in turn frees the best in people.

At its root, the primal job of leadership is emotional. The glue that holds people together in a team, and that commits people to an organization, is the emotions they feel. How well leaders manage and direct those feelings to help a group meet its goals depends on their level of emotional intelligence.

When leaders drive emotions positively, they bring out everyone's best, an effect termed "resonance" by Goleman. When they drive emotions negatively, leaders spawn "dissonance", undermining the emotional foundations that let people shine. A primal leadership dictum is that resonance amplifies and prolongs the emotional impact of leadership. Resonance comes naturally to emotionally intelligent leaders, their passion and enthusiastic energy resounds throughout the group.

In *Primal Leadership* Goleman updates the model of emotional intelligence domains and competencies. Simplifying it into four domains (instead of former five); self awareness, self management, social awareness and relationship management, with eighteen competencies instead of the original twenty-five. The result is an emotional intelligence model that more clearly links specific clusters of competencies to the underlying brain dynamics that drive them. Each of the four domains of emotional intelligence adds a crucial set of skills for resonant leadership. These domains are closely intertwined, and dynamically interrelated, which in turn are the basic ingredients of effective primal leadership.

Typically, the most effective leaders act according to one or more of six distinct approaches to leadership and skillfully switch between the various styles depending on the situation. Four of these styles, visionary, coaching, affiliative and democratic, create the kind of resonance that boosts performance, while two others, pacesetter and commanding, may be useful in some very specific situations. This does not mean that leaders need to be overly nice all the time, the art of emotional leadership includes pressing the reality of work demands without unduly upsetting people.

Perhaps uniquely among management theories, the primal leadership model builds on links to neurology. Gifted leadership occurs where heart and mind, feeling and thought, meet. The brain circuitry that interweaves thought and feeling provides the neural basis of primal leadership.

In this sense, an important contribution the book makes is the recognition that emotional intelligence competencies are not innate talents, but learned abilities, each of which plays its part in making leaders more resonant and therefore more effective.

Research shows that skills based in limbic areas, i.e. the emotional intelligence abilities, like leadership, are best learned through motivation, extended practice and feedback. However, most training programs aimed at enhancing them target the neocortex rather than the limbic brain. Thus, learning is limited and sometimes can even have a negative impact. The design of the neocortex makes it a highly efficient learning machine, expanding our understanding by linking new ideas or facts to an extensive cognitive network. The limbic brain, on the other hand, is a much slower learner, particularly when the challenge is to relearn deeply ingrained habits. This difference matters immensely when trying to improve leadership skills. Through our work with our clients at Axialent, we apply this model of intervention, since it is the only one that can assure exceptional and sustainable results. Reeducating the emotional brain for leadership learning requires a different model from what works for the thinking brain: it needs lots of practice, repetition and constant accompaniment.

The model proposed by Goleman for leadership development derives from Boyatzis's theory of self-directed learning; intentionally developing or strengthening an aspect of who you are or what to be, or both. Such self directed learning is most effective when you understand the process of change, and the steps to achieve it, as you go through it. Self directed learning involves five discoveries: 1) the ideal self, 2) the real self, 3) the learning agenda, 4) experimenting with and practicing new behaviors to the point of mastery, 5) developing supportive and trusting relationships that make change possible.

This enlightening book has another attractive characteristic that makes its reading highly recommendable. Primal Leadership can be extended to teams and whole organizations. Most of the principles described in this book can be applied to the collective framework. Groups begin to change only when they have fully grasped the reality of how they function, particularly when individuals in the group recognize that they are working in situations that are dissonant or uncomfortable.

For too long, managers have seen emotions at work as noise cluttering the rational operation of organizations. But the time for ignoring emotions as irrelevant for business has passed. What organizations everywhere need now is to realize the benefits of primal leadership by cultivating leaders who generate the emotional resonance that lets people flourish.

Goleman's analysis suggests that, overall, the climate (how people feel about working at a company) can account for 20 to 30 percent of business performance, suggesting that getting the best of people definitely pays off in hard results.

If climate drives business results, what drives climate? Roughly 50 to 70 percent of how employees perceive their organization's climate can be traced to the actions of one person: the leader. More than anyone else, the boss creates the conditions that directly determine people's ability to work well.

Primal Leadership will matter more in years to come. The old model of leadership had a functional focus. Such impersonal leadership fails today. Resonant leaders shatter the old leadership mold, cast in old fashioned "lead from the top" figures of authority. The new leaders know when to be collaborative and when to be visionary, when to listen and when to command, they are able to articulate a mission that resonates with the values of those they lead, they nurture relationships, surface simmering issues and create the human synergies of a group in harmony.